

Vending Machine Changes Increase Access for Residents and Staff

Initiative in Brief

Established in 1982, Housing Resources Inc. (HRI) has dedicated its efforts to finding housing solutions for individuals in the midst of a crisis. This small firm of 40 employees runs on a lean budget like many of its residents but wanted to take some efforts to assist their employees in being healthy. Combining low-budget lunch-and-learns with changes to vending machine options and the addition of a water cooler created an environment that raised awareness about health promotion and disease prevention and provided an avenue to practice their new health habits.

The brown bag lunch-and-learns included such topics as holistic health, diabetes education, reading food labels, portion control, benefits of soy, fad diets, how to start an exercise program, cooking classes, tobacco cessation classes, health screenings, foot clinic, massages, etc. Many of these classes were done with little or no money through existing programs at universities, cooperative extension, and hospital wellness coordinators and programs.

HRI also took more permanent strides to help their employees, which ended up helping 80 residents at their main office also. HRI staff worked with representatives of the local hospital and the vending machine companies to secure a machine that would sell milk, 100% fruit juice, lean cuisine meals and other healthy food options. Twenty-four hour evening staff are not allowed to leave the premises and therefore benefited greatly from having nutritious foods available. Many residents are in transition without transportation and benefited from being able to "shop" from the newly refrigerated vending machine. The milk "flew off the shelf" and now the machine is serviced at least two times a week!

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Benefits

Noted benefits of the program are:

- Increased access to healthy foods for residents without transportation.
- Revenue generated from the new vending machine.
- 24 hour evening staff who couldn't leave the premises had greater access to healthy food.



Challenges

- Need help of hospital wellness staff to determine what to put in the new vending machine.
- Initial coordination with new vending company was a learning process.
- Not enough turnover to sell fruits and vegetables in the refrigerated vending machine.

Cost: Initial Time Investment to coordinate
Risk Factor: Nutrition and Physical Activity
Impact/Reach: 40 staff and 80 residents
Business/Sector: Non-profit